

COLLEGE BOARD REPORT SHOWS IOWA SAT, AP and PSAT SCORES REMAIN STRONG

(DES MOINES, IOWA - AUGUST 26, 2003) Iowa public school graduates from the May 2003 class continued their strong showing on the SAT college entrance exam, and more of them graduated with some experience in Advanced Placement (AP) classes, according to the 2003 summary report from The College Board. In addition, more high school sophomores and juniors took the PSAT exams, a good indicator of college aspirations.

SAT scores remained high, with an average 593 mean verbal score and 605 mean math score, both down slightly from last year. The national average was 507 in verbal and 519 in math. The highest possible score is 800 in each category.

The SAT is most often needed for admission to colleges outside the Midwest; as a result, only about 1,400, or 4 percent, of public school students in Iowa take the SAT, so it is not a significant indicator of overall or average students achievement, said Ted Stilwill, director of the Iowa Department of Education. However, students who do participate have continued the trend of very high scores.

The more relevant information for Iowa from the College Board report is the progress schools are making in offering more Advanced Placement courses, and that additional students are taking those classes, said Stilwill. "It is encouraging that more students are challenging themselves with rigorous AP coursework. We've seen gradual increases in participation over the years, and we'd like to see that continue at an even higher rate. More than 80 percent of students say they plan to attend college or specialized training after high school, yet not enough are taking advanced classes or college prep work."

The College Board AP program allows students to pursue college-level studies while they are still in high school, most often in their junior or senior years. Students choose among 34 classes in 19 subject areas, and most colleges grant credit or advanced placement to students with high AP exam scores.

Iowa's AP highlights include:

- 191 accredited high schools offer AP on site (up from 150 last year; Iowa and Oklahoma had the largest gain in AP schools in the past year)
- 4,173 test takers (14.9% increase over last year's 3,642)
- 5,935 exams taken (19.9% increase over last year's 4,961)
- 67.8% or 3,993 scored 3 or higher (66% scored 3 or higher last year); 5 is the highest possible score; nationally, 59.8% of students scored 3 or higher.

AP participation rates are lowest in the high schools with fewer than 100 seniors, probably because the smallest high schools find it difficult or impractical to offer advance courses, said Stilwill. "These schools can't afford to offer a class that only several students will take," he said.

Stilwill expects participation rates and test scores to increase in the next several years as more schools and students access AP coursework through the Iowa Online AP Academy (IOAPA), which provides AP courses to public and private schools over the Internet or ICN. The Iowa Online AP Academy was developed in the Fall of 2001 by the Belin-Blank

International Center for Gifted Education at the University of Iowa, in cooperation with the Iowa Department of Education, and is federally funded.

This year, 247 accredited Iowa high schools registered with the Iowa Online AP Academy, representing all 12 Area Education Agencies and 92 counties. About 95 percent are rural or small schools, according to IOAPA. In the first two years of the IOAPA, more than 1,200 public and private school students have taken one of the 14 online or ICN courses, and nearly 1,200 have used other AP materials and processes provided by the academy.

The Iowa Online AP Academy includes an Advanced Placement Teacher Training Institute conducted at the University of Iowa, which has trained nearly 200 teachers. "Students from diverse settings must have access to the best courses and instructors trained in teaching Advanced Placement classes, and the University of Iowa's initiative in this area has been a key contributor," said Stilwill.

Another strong indicator of college success is participation in the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT), which assesses a student's ability to reason with facts and concepts. The PSAT/NMSQT also gives test-takers - typically high school sophomores and juniors - an opportunity to practice for the SAT and to enter scholarship competitions.

Iowa students who take the test generally score above national averages; for instance, sophomores scored 51.4 in verbal (compared to 43.6 nationally), 53.2 in math (45.0), and 52.0 in writing (45.2). Iowa juniors scored 50.6 in verbal (47.5), 52.8 in math (48.9), and 51.2 in writing (48.3). The highest possible score is 80.

For more information:

- Iowa's overall achievements: www.state.ia.us/educate
- IOAPA: www.uiowa.edu/~belinctr/ or www.iowaAPacademy.org/.
- Kathi Slaughter, Iowa Department of Education, 515/281-5651